

The Environmental Protection Agency's National Lake Fish Tissue Study: A National Collaboration to Assess Fish Contamination

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The OW is conducting the largest national freshwater fish contamination survey undertaken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), the National Study of Chemical Residues in Lake Fish Tissue (or the National Lake Fish Tissue Study). The National Lake Fish Tissue Study includes the largest set of chemicals studied in fish, and it is the first national fish contamination survey to have sampling sites statistically selected. Agencies in 47 states and three tribes, along with two other federal agencies, collaborated with the U.S. EPA for four years to collect fish from 500 lakes and reservoirs in the lower 48 states. Sampling teams applied consistent methods nationwide to collect samples of predator and bottom-dwelling species from each lake.

The U.S. EPA is analyzing the fish tissue for 268 chemicals including mercury, arsenic, dioxins and furans, PCBs, and pesticides. Results for the first three years of the study show that mercury and PCBs were detected in predator species at all 361 sites sampled, while dioxins and furans were detected at about 80% of these sites.

The U.S. EPA will complete analysis of the cumulative four-year dataset during 2005 and produce the final study report in 2006. When completed in 2006, this study will provide the first national estimates of mean concentrations of the 268 target chemicals in fish. It will also provide a national baseline for assessing progress of pollution control activities that limit release of these chemicals into the environment.